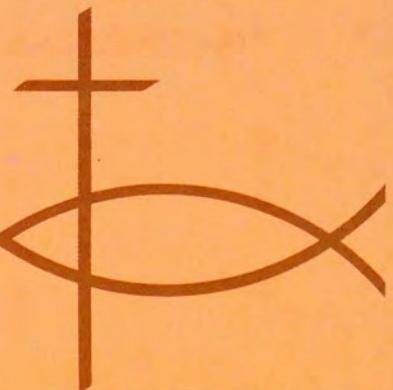


St. Theodore Church



St. Theodore Church

GATES, NEW YORK



The statue of St. Theodore, an original Achille Forgione creation, donated by:

1975

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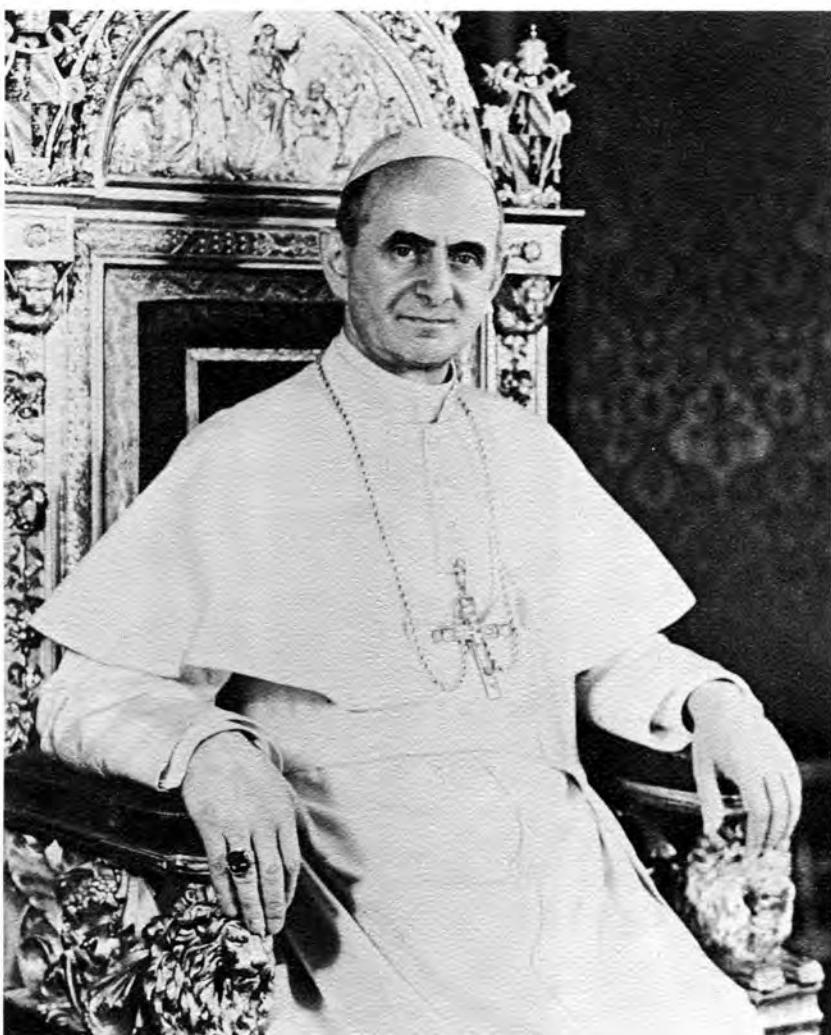
Mrs. George Meisenzahl

Mrs. Raymond Monagan

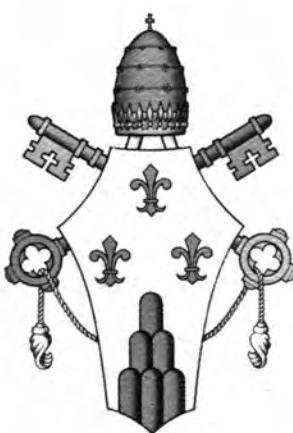
Mrs. Julia Kirby

Mrs. Harold Russell

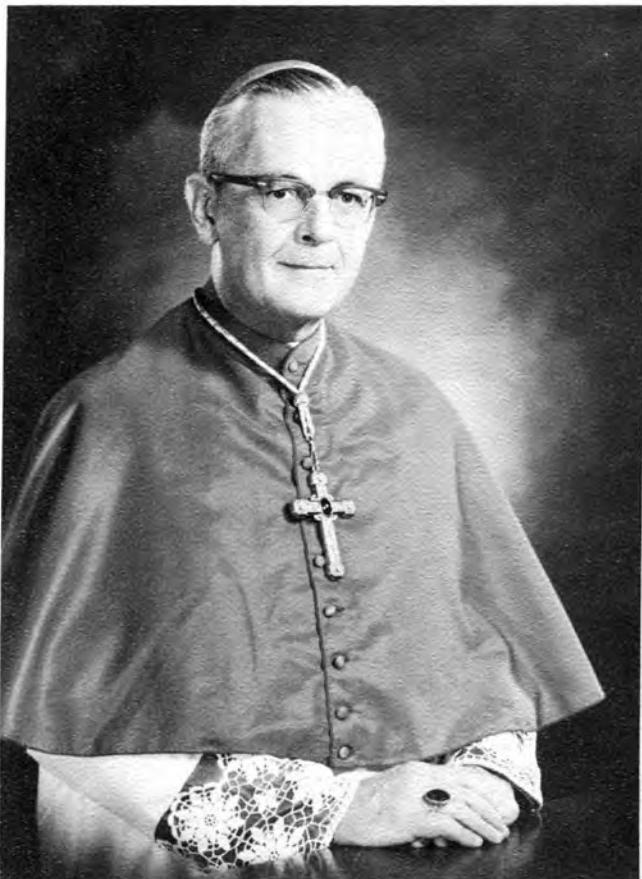
Mrs. Lawrence Kenney



*His Holiness
Pope Paul VI*



*Apostolic Benediction granted to Priests and Parishioners on the occasion
of the Golden Anniversary of St. Theodore's Church (April 30, 1974).*



Most Reverend
Joseph L. Hogan, S.T.D., D.D.
Bishop of Rochester



Diocese of Rochester
1150 Buffalo Road
Rochester, New York 14624
Office of the Bishop

June 1974

My dear Friends of St. Theodore's Parish,

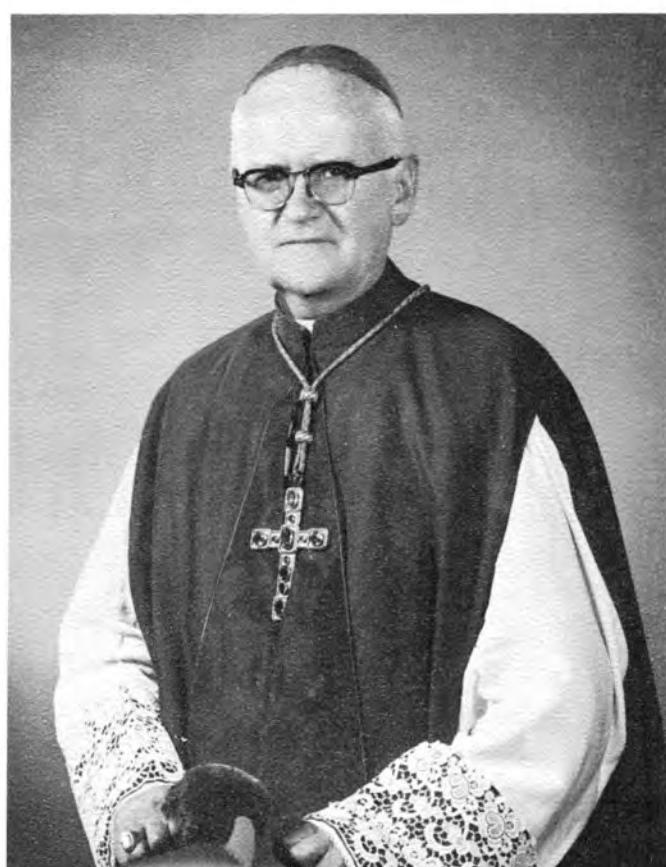
I look forward to the day of celebration of your Golden Jubilee when I shall be privileged to preside at the Eucharistic assembly gathered in the perfect act of thanksgiving to God for all His blessings during fifty years of your history.

Your celebration is a summary of days and years of His gracious providence. The usual ingredients that are found in the birth and growth of any parish are present in your historical record. The beginnings were humble, the sacrifices of the pioneers inspiring. Their great faith removed all obstacles which at times must have appeared like mountains.

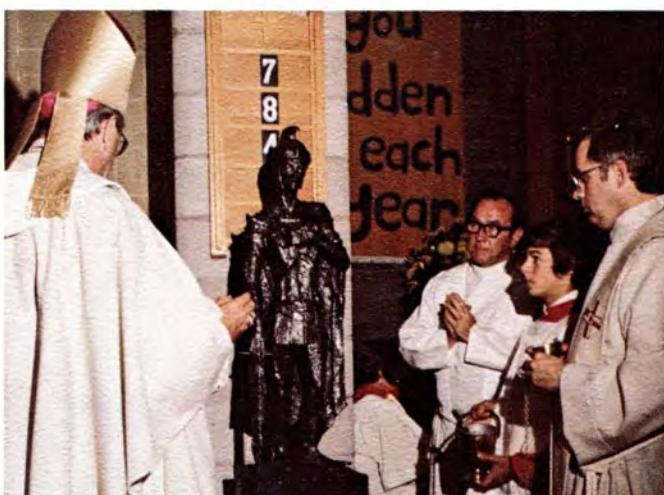
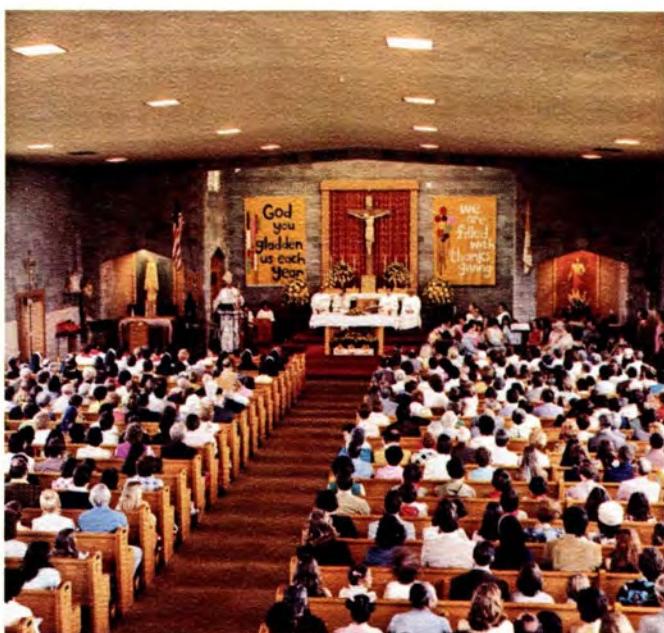
We who survive to rejoice in 1974 bless the memory and dedication of those who have brought us to this moment. We renew our common effort as a community of faith to begin a new chapter in the history of Saint Theodore's that will be inspiring reading for generations yet unborn.

Your devoted Shepherd in Christ,

Joseph L. Hogan
+Most Reverend Joseph L. Hogan, D.D.
Bishop of Rochester



Most Reverend
Dennis W. Hickey, D.D., V.G.
Auxiliary Bishop of Rochester
(Pastor, 1961-1968)



GOLDEN JUBILEE MASS ~ **JUNE 30, 1974**



Jubilee Committee



Men's Club

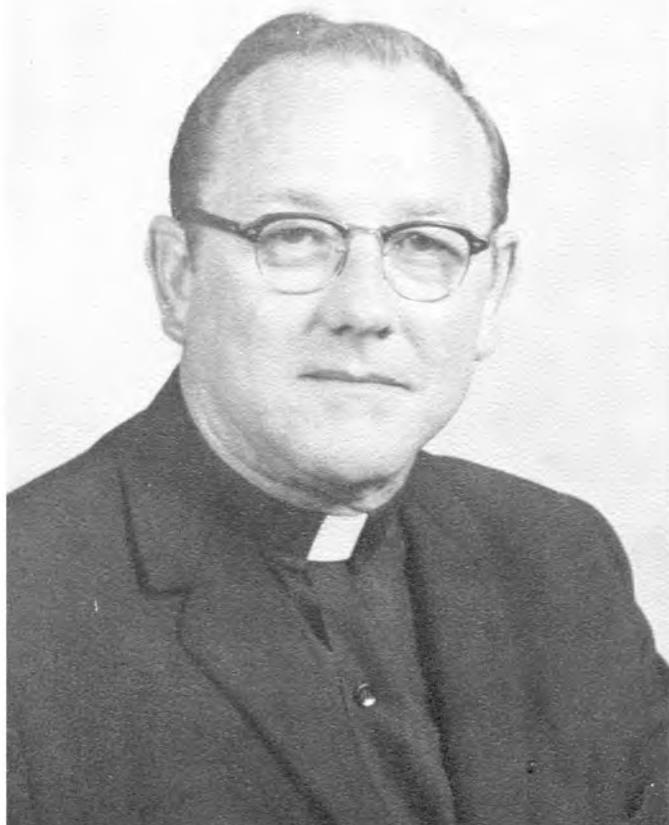


Human Development Committee

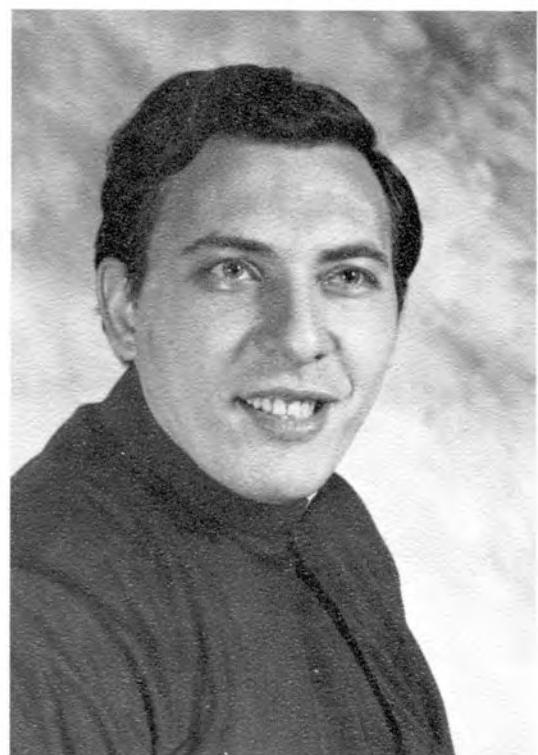
Worship Committee



Retreat League



*Reverend Gerald E. Dunn
Pastor*



*Reverend Frank J. Falletta
Associate Pastor*

People of God

By Domenick White

The Struggle

"Simon, son of John, do you love me?"
"Yes, Lord," Peter said, "you know that I love you."
(John 21:16)

"What would your answer be to this question, should Christ direct it to you? Well, we are being asked, and the way we live our lives, gives Him the answer."

..... From the homily delivered by Reverend Gerald E. Dunn, Pastor, Sunday, April 28, 1974

The question, asked by our beloved pastor, rings out over the five decades that have elapsed since St. Theodore's was created as a parish on July 1, 1924. Now, the time has come to explore those past events which best illustrate its material and spiritual growth during the past fifty years, events which help us to conclude that our parish's answer, as the People of God, is a direct, affirmative, reply to Christ's question.

As we look at St. Theodore's history, we find that there are so many personal actions that must contribute towards manifesting this "love," actions that require both public and private demonstrations in order to begin even the tiniest steps to giving "all of ourselves to Christ." And we find that these necessary personal actions — self-denial, self-sacrifice, and a total, abiding faith in Christ — have been present among us even before the very beginning of St. Theodore's Parish.

So, back we must go, beyond even July 1, 1924, to find out when the seeds of a parish were first planted in the hearts and minds of the Catholics of North Gates, who were so far west of the Genesee River and the City of Rochester.

Earliest Days

Most of the Catholic families in North Gates were members of either Holy Apostles or Holy Family Parish, both of which were located several miles to the east, within the city limits. Consequently, distance and means of transportation became among the most important obstacles a Catholic family had to surmount in order to fulfill the obligations of its faith.

This was especially true when it came to having their children attend Catholic school. The children either walked to school, which for some meant four hours, or they got a ride, if fortunate enough, from some local horse-driven milk or farm produce wagons, going to the city to supply the needs of its residents.

No more rapid a means of transportation was available until the coming of the Rochester, Lockport, and Buffalo Railway, for which two stops were located in North Gates, one on Lee Road, and the other at Statt Road (now Long Pond Road), from 1908 to 1931.

While this was a more convenient and faster way to go to school, it also had some drawbacks. Many were the times a full trolley car passed up the two Gates stops, causing the children either to wait an extra hour for the next trolley or to miss school completely.

Even catching a trolley car on time did not mean your troubles were over, for once you arrived at Lyell Avenue and Hague Street in the city, you still had the long walk to Holy Family School. The walk seemed even longer in bad weather. Winter, then as now, was a cruel tyrant exacting its heavy toll in human misery, and many were the times when a child arrived at school with a frozen lunch and quickly found himself placed against a steampipe in order to thaw out. The trip back home at the end

continued



Parish Council



Parish Secretaries



Altar Boys



Lady Altar Workers



Bingo Committee

CCD Staff



Rosary Altar Society





Lectors



Ushers



Finance Committee



Education Committee



Ladies Auxiliary Knights of St. John

Nocturnal Adoration Society



Building and Maintenance



of the day was usually a repetition of what had been suffered on the incoming trip, except that upon arriving home the additional responsibility of completing the day's chores awaited.

A round trip on the trolley line every school day cost ten cents. Money was a commodity that generally had to be conserved, for a dollar was very hard to come by and, unfortunately, many were the households in rural Gates that had all too few of them.

Fewer still were the families fortunate enough to have an automobile. If paying the ten-cents-round trip on the trolley car was a hardship, it would be a long time before they could afford an automobile. What they needed was a local Catholic church and school in North Gates, where their children could walk to school as did the other neighborhood children, who attended the small district public school on Spencerport Road.

The need for a local Catholic church and school was dramatically highlighted when one Catholic farm family found it necessary to rent its farm, auction off all stock and farm implements, and move into the city so the children could be within walking distance of the church in order to prepare for and make their First Communion. Their faith was without limit, and taking such extreme measures, expressed visibly the words, "You know that we love you, Lord."

Even though the Catholics of North Gates now felt deeply the need for obtaining a local parish, how could they go to their bishop with this request until they could also say, "We have sufficient numbers of people to adequately support a church and school." The few farm residences and even fewer private households in North Gates if seen from the air would have stuck out like oases in a desert. More people were vitally needed. Where would they come from, and when?

False Starts

It was 1919, and the Sunday before Labor Day. North Gates was all aflutter as the banner-decked free trolley cars from the city discharged their passengers at the Statt Road stop.

Grafton Johnson, a land speculator from the midwest, knew that the lure of a paid trolley ride, with free boxes of chocolates for the ladies and free Havana cigars for the men, would draw enough

people out to North Gates to consider buying his fifty-foot lots at a dollar down, with fifty to seventy-five cents weekly payments, until — as with one choice — a total of one hundred and nineteen dollars was paid.

The people from the city crowded the tents that had been set up on what had been the Statt family's pioneer farm and was now called the Norwood Gardens sub-division.

World War I was over, and the first real rush to the suburbs by the so-called "Westsiders" was taking place. Soon other sub-divisions — Kirkwood Gardens, Ross-More Gardens, Beechwood Gardens, Scott-wood, and the Baier re-subdivision — opened up. Many of these land developments would never really be completed until the beginning of the second big rush to the suburbs in the 1960's, falling prey to the economic onslaughts of the Great Depression of the 1930's. But that dark cloud wasn't anywhere on the horizon as yet, for now the sky was cloud-free and a lovely Marian blue.

But the promise of what these developments could be, and the numbers of people they would bring, made it the time to start appealing to the bishop for a parish in North Gates. In the years before the eventual success of 1924, appeals took every shape and form imaginable, such as petitions (circulated both in the Lee Road and Statt Road areas) phone calls, personal visits (made either singly or in couples by various interested parties) and letters.

The exchange of letters between Mrs. Theodore B. Statt and Bishop Thomas F. Hickey in December of 1921 are indicative of the intensity of the desire on the part of North Gates people for a church, and their willingness to conquer all obstacles. But it was not the bishop alone who had to be won over.

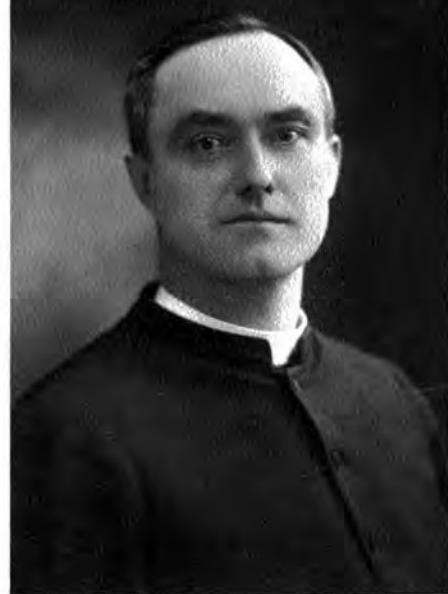
Closer To Reality

One important diocesan group, also involved in the decision-making process, was the Board of Consultors. This group was composed of priests from the Diocese of Rochester, who, among other responsibilities, advised the bishop on the question of beginning new parishes. The possibility of a parish in North Gates was first proposed to them in 1923 at their April 16th meeting. They needed all the facts and opinions they could obtain in order to make their recommendations to the bishop as realistic as possible. A new parish was a major

continued



*Reverend John J. Baier
Founder and First Pastor
1924-1937*



*Reverend Dietrich Laurenzis, M.R.
1852-1925*



*Right and above:
Mr. and Mrs. Matthew J. Casey*

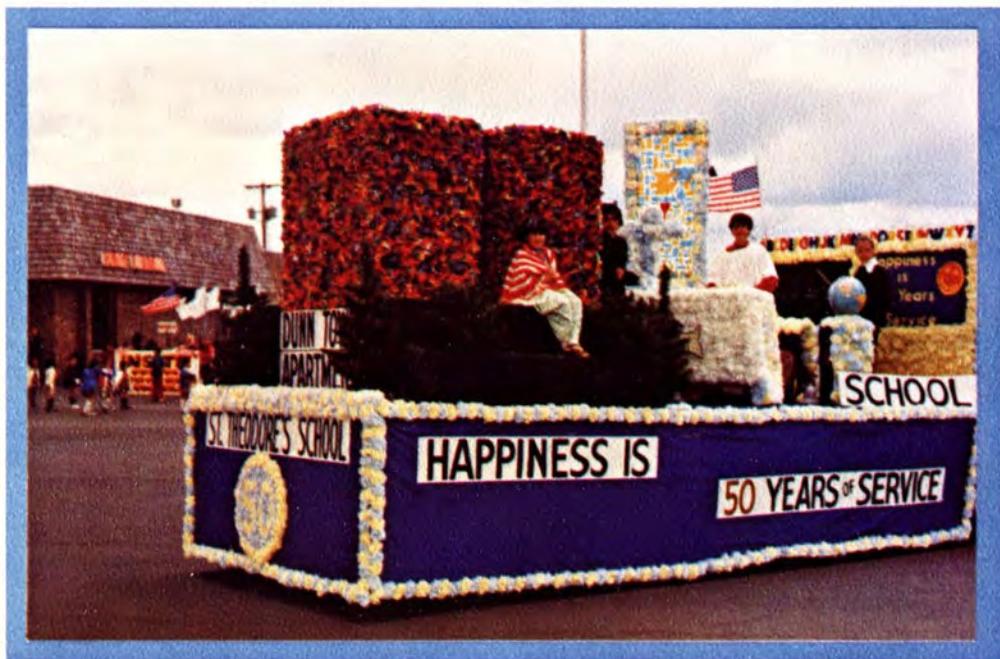


Mr. and Mrs. Theodore B. Statt





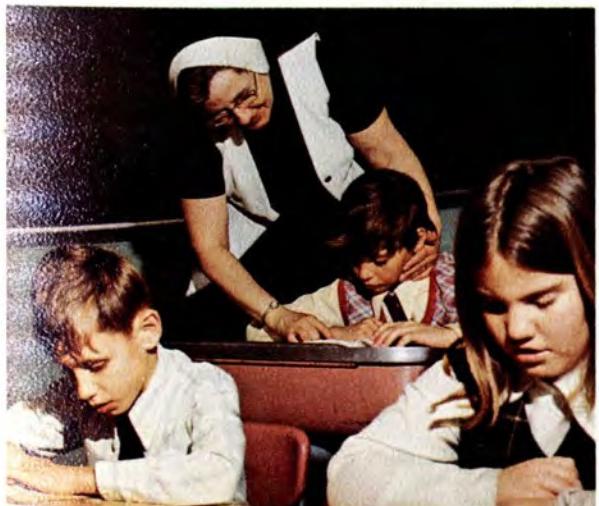
Artist's sketch of Dunn Tower Apartments Senior citizen housing development, built on land donated by St. Theodore's Parish



Prizewinning float entered in the 1974 Town of Gates Memorial Day Parade



St. Theodore's Faculty and Staff



decision for any bishop to make, but creating one before it could succeed might only mean the heartbreak of an inevitable failure.

Asked by Bishop Hickey to investigate the question of a church in North Gates, Father John J. Baier, assistant pastor at Holy Family Parish, promptly did so and his final report reads, in part:

In reference to conditions in the town of Gates on the Lyell and Spencerport Roads, west of the Barge Canal . . . The Catholics in this section are anxiously awaiting the accommodation of a Catholic church and school. Within a radius of one mile, from the intersection of the Spencerport Road and Statt Road, there are approximately seventy Catholic families, with about the same number of children of school age. This information is the result of an interview with Mrs. Casey on the Lyell Road and Mrs. Statt on the Statt Road. These Catholics think themselves able to bear the financial burden of a church and school.

Because a large Italian community (approximately one hundred families) located in the square bounded by Lexington Avenue to the North, Fields Road to the East (now Mount Read Boulevard) Emerson Street to the South, and Lee Road to the West; and because one hundred and fifty Catholic children attending School No. 43 on Fields Road at Lyell Avenue, were no longer able to attend religious instruction in the upstairs living room of Mr. Person's grocery store, Father Baier concluded, "It seems to me that this entire situation could be handled by a parish church near School No. 43. The assistant of this church could care for a chapel on Spencerport Road and the Lexington Avenue section."

With information and reports of this kind flowing in, the Board of Consultors at its July 23rd meeting came down to considering whether a new parish for North Gates should go to the sixty-five families of the Lee Road district or to the approximately fifty families of the Statt Road district.

In all probability this is exactly the question which was resolved when Mr. and Mrs. Matthew Casey from Lyell Road (District A) and Mr. and Mrs. Theodore Statt from Statt Road (District B) had an appointment to see the bishop at one point during the debate.

Tangible Results

The Catholics of North Gates persevered and on May 14, 1924, more than one year after having first been proposed, the canonical approval for the erection of the new (but as yet unnamed) parish was granted by the Board of Consultors. No longer would there be any talk of a mission chapel served from a new parish on Mount Read Boulevard. And by 1930, even the Italian colony would leave St. Theodore's Parish, forming their own parish, Most Precious Blood, centered on Stenson Street in the City of Rochester.

Before Bishop Thomas F. Hickey left for Europe, to make his ten-year report on the condition of the Diocese of Rochester to the Pope, he announced formally the creation of a new parish in North Gates as of July 1, 1924, and that Father John J. Baier was to be its founding pastor.

In order to help the new parish's viability, more than Districts A and B were included in the new parish's boundaries. The new parish extended as far north as the Town of Greece and Ridgeway Avenue; to the east the boundary line went into the City of Rochester, aligned with Mount Read Boulevard and the present B. & O./C. & O. Railroad tracks (formerly the B. R. & P.); it followed the railroad south to Buffalo Road and then ran out west along Lyell Road, after coming up Howard Road north to Lyell Road. From Lyell Road the line went west to what is presently Manitou Road, formerly called the Ogden Townline Road.

The Victory

In July 1, 1924, the new parish was created, but on paper only. Where would the Masses be celebrated?

By July 4th, Father Baier had pedaled out to Gates to answer that very question. After having been an assistant pastor at Holy Family for twelve years he was now ready to move as fast as possible to get the new parish going. These North Gates Catholics had waited, suffered, and endured long enough. It must be God's will that they have a parish, and it was time to make that promise a reality.

Traveling west, past the Barge Canal, Father stopped at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Matthew Casey, as he knew them well from Holy Family. He asked



The Michael Kenney Homestead — This peaceful farm was the original site of St. Theodore's first parish services, in use from July 4, 1924, to October 25, 1925



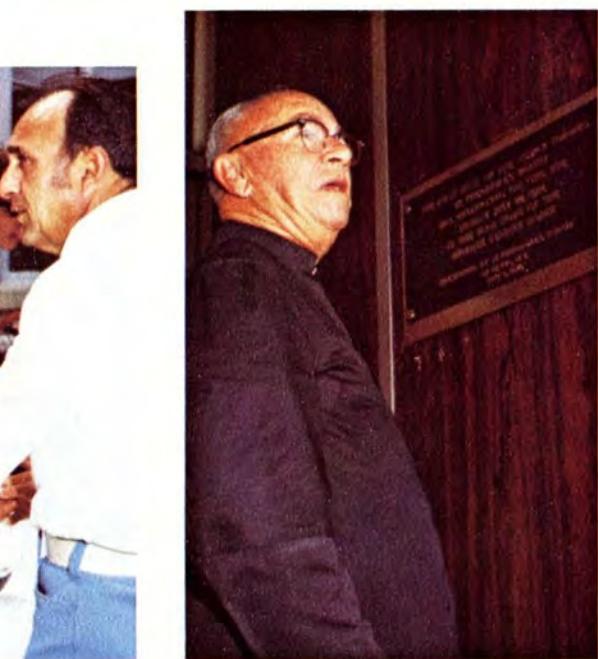
East porch of the Kenney Home, decorated and fittingly adorned for first outdoor Mass

Christmas, 1924, Midnight Mass at the farm — a tribute to eternal faith, love, and sacrifice





From 1924 to 1974 – Half a Century of fond remembrances are gratefully acknowledged on Pioneer and Alumni Day, September 2nd, with an outdoor Mass and barbecue



for some suggestions about where they thought a building could be found that would serve as an adequate temporary church until the new buildings could be erected. The large farm home of the Michael Kenney family, which was a double house, was suggested. This home was farther west, at the intersection of Lyell and Howard Roads, where J. M. Field's Plaza is now presently located. The Lincoln First Bank of Rochester (Gates Branch) presently situated in the same Plaza, is located on what was once the backyard of that old home.

Mrs. George Meisenzahl tells how her parents' home was selected as the first temporary church for St. Theodore's Parish from July 4, 1924 to October 25, 1925.

"My husband and I were out in the yard when we saw this priest coming in on a bicycle. I did not know Father Baier as I went to Holy Apostles and I said to myself, 'Here comes a priest; I wonder what he wants?'

"He introduced himself and said, 'Hello, I'm Father Baier from Holy Family Parish. Bishop Hickey has given me permission to start a parish out here and I am looking for a building or a hall that could be used to celebrate Mass temporarily. I talked with Mrs. Casey, who is a friend of mine, and she suggested that I come up here and see you people, because you have a big house.'

"Needless to say," says Mrs. Meisenzahl, "I was startled." "Well, come on in and see my mother and dad."

"My father was out in the fields but my mother was home, and so I introduced Father Baier to her."

"Mother, this is Father Baier from Holy Family. Believe it or not he is looking for a place for a church."

"'For a church?' " she said. "She was really taken aback."

"Yes, and they are considering our home. Mrs. Casey suggested that Father Baier see us."

"A church! In our common house?"

"My parents were so overawed by this real honor. You couldn't do anything for them that could ever come close to the honor of having Mass said in their house."

"Yes," Father Baier said. "This is a nice big house and we would like very much to have it."

"My mother said, 'Well, Father, I am so honored. You come right in and go through the

whole house, and any part of it you want is yours.' "

"No sooner had she said that, than Father was already suggesting the use of the east dining room for the organ, and then further explained how the chairs for the parishioners would be placed in both the east and west dining rooms, in this double house."

"Father then said, 'The altar will go in the (west) dining room,' and turning around he said to George Meisenzahl, 'You're a carpenter. You can build the altar.' George said, 'Yes,' to Father."

"I can use this room (our little library) for my vestments and for Confession. I want to start Mass in two weeks."

First Mass

The next two weeks passed quickly as the Kenney home was transformed into the parish's first place of worship. Sunday, July 20, 1924, was picked for celebrating the first Masses in the parish, at 8 and 10 a.m., with the 8:00 o'clock service scheduled as a High Mass with Benediction following.

When word had spread through North Gates that Mass was going to be said in the Kenney home, people arrived in such numbers that the plans had to be changed from an "indoor Mass" to an "outdoor Mass."

The altar, after having been measured, was moved to the porch on the east side of the house, where everything was prepared for the celebration of Mass. Accommodations were made for the Holy Family Choir on the porch, as they had volunteered to sing at the High Mass.

Cars were parked in an empty lot (now a group of stores, to the east of J. M. Field's Plaza), and as more and more cars passed the scene of this devoted congregation publicly expressing its faith, accompanied by the choir's rich and vibrant singing, even strangers impulsively pulled in and parked in order to participate in the remainder of the celebration. In fact, one man could be seen sitting on the fender of his car, crying silently throughout the whole Mass. The side steps of the porch were used for distributing Communion and many came forward to receive the sacrament.

A bronze plaque commemorating this historic first Mass at St. Theodore's was dedicated as part of the activities held on Alumni and Pioneer Day on September 2, 1974, a highlight of the



Even snow did not deter Bishop Hickey and the Parish Faithful as they started rounds to inspect potential sites for the new church

Golden Jubilee. This plaque was placed in the vestibule of Lincoln First Bank of Rochester, (Gates Branch). The inscription reads as follows: "The first Mass of the newly formed St. Theodore's Parish was celebrated on this site, Sunday, July 20, 1924, at the farm home of the Michael Kenney Family. Presented by: St. Theodore's Parish of Gates, New York, September 2, 1974."

As far as is known, this is the first historic marker to be put up in the Town of Gates by a private organization.

The plaque dedication was followed by a repetition of the first outdoor Mass, again publicly manifesting to all the worship of God.

It was at the first Mass that Father Baier announced that the name of the new parish would be St. Theodore's in honor of Father Dietrich Laurenzis, M.R., Pastor of Holy Family Church. His first name "Dietrich" is a German abbreviation for the full name, "Theodoric." Father Laurenzis had taken to using the Anglo-Saxon spelling of "Theodore" when he had fled to the United States in 1875, in order to escape Bismarck's persecution of both the Catholic church and the clergy, during, what was called, the "Kulturkampf" or "clash of cultures."

St. Theodore, who had been a recruit in the Roman army, also suffered persecution and death for his Christian beliefs, when he refused repeated attempts to have him worship at the pagan ceremonies held for the Roman army. His feast day is November 9th.

Our parish is honored to carry the names of two men who were willing to suffer any punishment for Christ. Father Laurenzis pointed this out in an open letter to a Catholic newspaper, when, upon

returning to Germany in 1880 to visit his parents, (after having become an American citizen), he was still harassed by followers and government agents who had the responsibility of implementing Chancellor Bismarck's anti-Catholic policy:

In my last note to you I said that I had been accused of saying Mass on the 28th of November, 1880, and I did not know how this trouble would end . . . In my absence, after the inquisition was finished here in the town, (Letmathe) the whole matter was sent to the Governor of Westfalia. After having read the papers, he sent them back to the police court giving orders to inquire minutely whether I had sung or prayed loud at my Mass! . . . One of those "liberal" said I ought to be punished severely for saying Mass, because I did it merely to spite the laws of the land . . . Should I be brought before the court on this account, also, I shall console myself with the words of Holy Scripture, which say of the apostles who had been brought before it on account of their preaching the Gospel of Christ: "They left the court rejoicing that they were found worthy, for Christ's sake, to suffer (ill-treatment)." Acts 6:41

It is said that this is the first (and possibly the only) parish in America to be named for St. Theodore Tiro, a most singular honor.

Fund Raising

Father Baier also announced at the First Mass, the first two of many social events to be held by St. Theodore's Parish as money raising affairs. The Bishop's decision to allow a parish in North Gates had not brought any allotted funds along with

it. The parishioners of St. Theodore's were on their own insofar as obtaining funds for the erection of their permanent buildings.

A lawn social for Saturday, July 26th, at the Theodore Statt home on Statt Road was announced along with the date for the first parish picnic, which was to be held on Sunday, August 24th, at the Maier's farm on Lyell and Statt Roads.

The first annual picnic became the first big project for the parish and everyone joined in to help. A portable dance floor was built and plans made to award door prizes. An afternoon ball game was scheduled, along with other sports for young and old, and children were admitted free; there was an eight-piece orchestra, and a Knights of Saint John Band. Plans also included picking up city residents at the Otis Street Station and bringing them out. The picnic — an unqualified success — resulted in approximately fifteen hundred dollars being raised.

The number and different types of fund-raising events that the parish put on in its early years are legion, too many to be listed here. Suffice it to say that the hard work of the individuals and families concerned helped to make a viable parish possible sooner than future events would have allowed. It can be said unequivocally that but for the determination, hard work, and perseverance shown, the crushing economic effects of the Depression of the 1930's and the World War that followed it would have made the founding of a parish in North Gates impossible until the second rush to the suburbs began after World War II ended.

One of the ways of raising money that deserves special mention was the efforts of the parish's Dramatic Club. This organization was formed by Joseph C. Durbin, who had presented his skills to Father Baier and had been accepted. The quality of the plays they put on were without equal. They added a dimension to St. Theodore's early reputation which was of the highest order. It was hard work well done. But now the golden leaves of autumn were gently falling to the ground.

A Year Passes

The first winter did not slow any activities that needed to be done. On December 6th, Bishop Hickey canonically established the parish; the new year saw its incorporation under the laws of the

State of New York. This was formalized on January 6, 1925. On this date also, Matthew Casey and Theodore Statt became the parish's first trustees, and both served in that capacity until they passed away.

That winter Bishop Hickey traveled to North Gates to help make the final determination of which site to select for the permanent location of the church. By January 26th, permission was received from the Board of Consultors to buy the four acres offered by the Kenney family on the Spencerport Road for four thousand dollars. The filing of the deed recording this transaction took place on March 24, 1925.

Father Baier, meanwhile, in order to be closer to the parish, rented Abe Mahuson's house (now 2013 Long Pond Road) on Statt Road for the parish's first rectory. From November, 1924, until March, 1925, when Mr. Mahuson returned from Florida sooner than expected, this house served as the central headquarters for the parish's business. Father Baier decided to stay at his sister's house at 322 Hague Street in the City of Rochester until the new rectory was opened on October 12, 1925.

The Kenney home was the scene of the parish's first Christmas Midnight Mass. At the organ was Celia Miller, the parish's first organist, who was to serve for more than twenty-five years in that capacity. The wish of everyone was to see the parish occupy the new buildings for the next Christmas Mass; that wish came a step closer to reality when the ground-breaking for the new buildings was held the week of May 10, 1925.

It was hard to imagine that a year had passed since Father Baier pedaled out to North Gates and asked the Kenneys for the use of their home as a church. Now Bishop Hickey was present to bless the cornerstone of the new church and school being built by Joseph Dietrich ("Dietrichs" seem to be drawn to St. Theodore's) with Frank Frey as the architect. The cost for the church and school was \$20,665.75. The rectory cost \$10,971.49. This necessitated a thirty thousand dollar loan from the Lincoln Alliance Bank.

At 4:30 p.m. on Sunday, July 12, 1925, the Bishop and the clergy proceeded from the new rectory to the foundation of the combination church and school building, escorted by the St. Theodore Commandery of the Knights of St. John from Holy Family Parish. About three

Coldwater, N. Y.
Dec. 18, 1921

Bishop Hickey:

Different people are asking about the church, whether we are going to have it or not. There is a story around that the plan for a church has been given up entirely, the people are getting anxious to know.

The ladies are asking if they can get ready for a fair after the church is completed. Then, I hear people tell - they would like to give a donation, but I cannot take it or do not know what to tell them, and we are ready to do whatever we can.

Also, if we may suggest a name, Our Lady of Lourdes, Saint Anne, and the Crucifixion, these are some that my Uncle, Father Bernadine spoke of.

Hoping to receive a favorable reply,

Mrs. Theo. B. Statt
Statt Road
Coldwater, N. Y.

Chancery Office
72 Frank St.
Rochester, N. Y.

December 22, 1921.

Mrs. Theodore B. Statt,
Coldwater, N. Y.

Dear Mrs. Statt:-

I am still interested in making every proper provision for the spiritual needs of the people in your district. I did not understand that there was any piece of property on which we could definitely count as a site for a church in case we wished to begin the building there.

At an early date after Christmas I will communicate again with you and probably with some suggestion about what our plan might be in this matter. So far it has been a question of discussing available sites in case that immediate neighborhood would be determined on officially as a place for a chapel or church. We will try to come to some decision in the early part of the year.

Yours sincerely in Christ,

+ Thomas J. Hickey
Bishop of Rochester.

hundred parishioners and visitors from the city were on hand to see this long-awaited event.

Bishop Hickey knew deeply the reality of what he said that afternoon to the assembled crowd, "Increased facilities for religious instruction have long been needed in this neighborhood. It is my hope that the frame structure, which would be dedicated in the Fall, would be replaced in a few years by a more permanent building as the parish develops."

Shortly after the cornerstone laying, Bishop Hickey had the trowel that was used for cementing the cornerstone made into two halves, each half personally inscribed, and then presented one to the Casey family and the other to the Statt family in recognition of the spirit of cooperation and compromise shown by the people of the two districts that formed the newly created parish.

People Make A Parish

The new frame structure, fifty-six feet wide and one hundred and ten feet long, combined a church and school with three classrooms. (The church was on the west side of the building, and had a seating capacity for two hundred and five persons; a three-room school was located on the east side of the building.)

With the "body" of the parish completed, other phases of the parish became Father's uppermost concern. Father Baier initiated activity on all levels; he encouraged families to register their children for the first school year starting that Fall, and by beginning religious instruction classes for all the parish youngsters, as well as classes for the parish's first group of altar boys.

When school opened on September 8, 1925, with a High Mass and Benediction, there was an enrollment of sixty-four pupils led by two teaching nuns of the Sisters of Saint Joseph: Sister Ferdinand Troy, S.S.J., who also served as first principal from 1925-1926, and Sister Isidora Blochinger, S.S.J., 1925-1930. After nearly fifty years, this Order still staffs the school, along with the help of dedicated lay teachers, of whom Mrs. Frances Meisenzahl was the first in 1952-1953.

Those Sisters who have given their service to St. Theodore's Parish as Principals of the school after 1926 were:

Sister DeNeri Gerber	1926-28
Sister Antonia Reinhart	1928-34
Sister Hilda Marie Friner	1934-40
Sister Mary Ernest Singer	1940-41
Sister Mercedes Shea	1941-47
Sister St. James Welch	1947-53
Sister Ruth Agnes Kesselring	1953-59
Sister Mary Brigid McCarthy	1959-61
Sister Dolores Teresa Trotta	1961-65
Sister Kathleen Burns	1965-70
Sister Mary Louise Heffernan	1970-73

Sister Janice Morgan, present principal, has filled that position since 1973.

Father Baier had not waited for school to open before beginning religious instruction for the Catholic schoolchildren of the parish. He began instructing a group of children after the end of Mass on Sunday, September 14, 1924. He probably never dreamed that by 1974, the public schoolchildren's C.C.D. program alone would number more than one thousand registrants.

He also immediately began instruction of the first group of boys from the parish to become altar boys. This group consisted of Ernest and Eugene McCarthy, Warren Lynch, Wilfred Hennessey, Paul Statt, and Raymond Weber. All of them started serving Mass in the Kenney home, following completion of their training.

School had been in session less than two months when the time arrived for the dedication by Bishop Hickey of the newly completed and functioning St. Theodore's Church and School. Sunday, October 25, 1925, was selected as the day for this momentous occasion, thus fulfilling completely the past Christmas wishes of the parishioners who had celebrated their first Christmas Mass together in the old Kenney family home.

Outward symbols of an inner grace enhance the serenity of St. Theodore's sanctuary in its new building, 1925





*The just-completed church-school
and rectory stand ready to welcome
all who would enter their portals*



*Sister Ferdinand Troy, first principal
of our school and an early classroom
group (with Father Baier)*



The first Christmas Mass in the old Kenney home was now to be the last Christmas Mass held there. In fact, with the church and school completed, the days of the Kenney home as the central place for worship and activity for St. Theodore's Church, were at an end.

That the Kenney home would no longer be the parish's church brought tears to the eyes of Mrs. Michael Kenney, as she had come to love having the presence of God so intimately real and close to all of her family. Mrs. Kenney could get a great deal of satisfaction, though, out of the knowledge that her family's home had seen the beginning of many firsts in the history of the parish.

The first wedding took place there on September 22, 1924, between George A. Geimer, of 1192 Lyell Avenue, a World War I veteran, and Miss Cecelia Magin, of 183 Campbell Park.

Another wedding of great significance, that also took place in the Kenney home, was that of Mr. and Mrs. Austin Warner, presently residing at 594 Wilder Road, Hilton, New York, which was held on September 15, 1925. This means that on September 15, 1975, they will be the first couple, still living, from St. Theodore's Parish to have reached their Golden Wedding Anniversary.

The first Baptism also took place there on July 27, 1924, when little Miss Veronica Carroll, born June 2, 1924, and the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. William J. Carroll, received the healing waters of that sacrament. Veronica is now Mrs. Carl T. Pickering of Hayts Corners, New York.

The first parish society was begun in the Kenney home and that was a spiritual organization called the Rosary Society, which was formed at a meeting held on January 19, 1925, organized by Father Baier and the women of the parish.

The oldest parish society still in existence is the Holy Name Society (now called the Men's Club) which had its first organizational meeting on November 15, 1925, three weeks after the new church was opened.

With the blessing of the new church, school, and rectory by Bishop Hickey on October 25, 1925, St. Theodore's Parish had taken a big step from babyhood to full adolescence. Now all normal parish functions would be situated in the complex of buildings erected to take care of this need.

The only vital building still missing was a convent for the nuns of St. Theodore's School. In



Cecelia Magin and George Geimer were the first couple to be married in the new parish

lieu of a parish convent they were picked up by automobile every day from Holy Apostles Convent, and brought out to the school. Prior to living at Holy Apostles they were transported from the old motherhouse on Augustine Street in the city. A building fund was started for the convent and when Frank Cook and Father Baier opened up the Baiers' re-subdivision across the street from the church in 1928 (this is how Baier Drive was named), a convent finally became possible. The new convent was built on a lot in the Baier re-subdivision, at the corner of Baier Drive and Spencerport Road. The convent cost sixty-three hundred dollars in 1928. The Sisters moved in on September 4, 1928, and an open house was held on Sunday, September 9, 1928.

The year 1926 dawned and three more important firsts took place in the parish.

On May 23, 1926, High Mass was celebrated at eight o'clock to mark the occasion of the first children in the parish to receive the Sacrament of Holy Communion upon completion of their preparation. Their names were: Henry Kowalski, Robert Snyder, Lawrence Weber, John Koneski, Helen Fisher, Dorothy Klein, Harold Meyers, Milton Daggar, Norma Tucker, Helen Cerra, Leona Robinson, Edward Wollek, Albert Shone, Lillian Koneski, Louise Shone, Elsie King, Edward Kowalski, Michael Cerra, Cecilia Reinagel, and Florence Kowalski.

On Sunday, June 20, 1926, at 4 p.m. the first graduates of St. Theodore School received their diplomas. The first graduating class consisted of Marion Daly, Warren Lynch, Ernest McCarthy, Eugene McCarthy, Paul Statt, and Margaret Wollek.

On Sunday, November 7, 1926, a High Mass was held for those children and adults who were going to be the first from the parish to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation from Bishop Hickey.

The names of this first Confirmation Class include: Genevieve Robinson, Thomas Chrisley, William Daggar, Josephine Koneski, Josephine Volkmar, Henry Kowalski, Edward Kowalski, Catherine Weber, Arthur Reinagel, Lawrence Weber, James Carlin Robert Snyder, Leo Statt, Joseph Lynch, Gladys Casey, Arleen Drew, Albert Donovan, Felicitas Reber, Dorothy Klein, Edward Wollek, Mary Fishbaugh, Margaret Shone, Richard Tucker, George Wollek, Leonard Clark, Richard Palmer, Cecilia Weber, Margaret Weber, Arnold Clark, Lucy Lynch, John Wollek, and Teresa Maier.

Adult confirmands were Laura Bintz, Clara Hughes, Frank Dittrich, and Richard Palmer.

Hard Times

Dark storm clouds began to fill the beautiful, Marian blue sky over St. Theodore's Parish as 1929 became a reality. The bubble of eternal optimism was bursting all over the world.

But before the Great Depression began to wrap its tentacles around, fully around, the people of North Gates, tragedy of another kind struck the parish. Father Baier's sight became seriously affected by a sudden problem with the retina in his right eye. How was this trouble to be followed through to a return to more normal functioning?

Anna Ries, first housekeeper of St. Theodore's Parish, was given permission by the Bishop to be the first woman in the diocese to chauffeur a pastor around on his parish business. She had learned to drive some time earlier, and had been making regular deliveries on the city egg route; these eggs had come from more than five hundred chickens kept at the rear of the church and school. A housekeeper of a country parish had to be a jack-of-all trades and ready for anything. What we take for granted today, in the way of street improvements,



Bishop Thomas F. Hickey, blessing and laying of cornerstone for the first church-school



Parish's first choir on an outing to Grandview Beach — 1925. Back Row, Left to Right — Anna Ries, Clara Miller, Celia Miller, Francis Kirby, Margaret Kenney, Francis Meisenzahl, Father John Baier. Front Row — Gertrude Kenney, Marie Kuhn, and Charles Carlin

Miss Anna Ries — Her efforts were vital to the parish from its inception



home utilities, or kitchen conveniences, were few and far between in rural North Gates.

When she wasn't driving the Overland, Mrs. Ries worked on starting the oldest church organization for women at St. Theodore's, the Ladies Auxiliary, No. 260, of the Knights of St. John, which came into being on July 29, 1929.

Later, on June 5, 1939, the Junior Ladies Auxiliary, No. 16, of the Knights of St. John was begun through the efforts of Ruth Hauck, Mary VerWeire, and Ruth Ackerman.

With the permission of Bishop O'Hern allowing Father Baier to use an altar missal with extra large size print; and with Anna Ries's chauffeuring, reasonable normalcy returned to the parish — if creeping economic depression can be called normal.

This economic tragedy first became noticeable when quarterly financial reports were made at the trustee meetings and it was seen that deficits began to exceed expenditures. People were losing jobs, even giving up their homes and moving in with other relatives. Hard times were here.

Appeals were made in church for clean used clothing for the poor of the entire Town of Gates, not just our parish. Many parishioners found they could not even afford schoolbooks for their children.

The few rays of sunlight that broke through the dark took place when Mr. and Mrs. Joseph R. Lynch saw their daughter Lucy enter the Sisters of St. Joseph, in September of 1932. Lucy took the religious name Sister Mary Ida and was the first person from St. Theodore's Parish to enter the religious.

Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Lynch saw three more of their children eventually enter the religious, they were Reverend Joseph Lynch, Reverend Leo Lynch, and Sister Mary Lynch, S.S.J.

Others professing over the years were Sister Anne dePorres Amesbury, S.S.J., Sister Mary Seitzinger, S.S.J., Sister Ann Dobbertin, S.S.J., and Sister Mary Ellen Campbell, S.S.J.; also Reverend Frederick Kelly, S.J., Reverend John Glogowski, and Reverend Ronald Fredericks.

The other ray of sunshine was the "propitious" win by Victor Tofany of St. Theodore's School, who emerged as the first place winner over one hundred and fifty-six other boys and girls competing at the Monroe County Spelling Bee held at the Rochester Exposition on Labor Day, September 4, 1933. As a result, he went to the New York State Fair in

Syracuse, representing Monroe County at the State Spelling Bee Contest, but, as he tells it, "During the second written test I became 'suspicious' of the way I had written 'suspicious,' and by changing it I lost the contest."

Victor's parents were as proud of their son as they were firm supporters of the kind of education given at St. Theodore's Grammar School. It was this sense of dedication that caused Mary Tofany and Delia Amesbury of Elmwood Road to fight for school bus transportation from the Elmwood Road School District to St. Theodore's. All of the Tofany brothers, and others, had walked the three miles to school at one time or other. Bernard, Benedict, Victor, and finally, Vincent Tofany, were graduated from St. Theodore's, so for these boys and the other students involved they fought. The case was appealed to Albany where Frank P. Graves, State Commissioner of Education, ruled against the two women because they had submitted their original appeal after the start of the school year. The school buses were rolling, finally, in the early 1940's.

The Depression Years

As though God were trying to let the people know that there were worse things than just a Depression, strange, yellowish cloud banks began forming in the western sky over Churchville and Gates on a hot, sizzling Friday afternoon, July 1, 1932. Thus Gates' only officially recorded Tornado came crashing through the parish blazing a trail of destruction one-eighth of a mile wide and seven miles long, finishing its wrath in the city. Howard Road, Wegman Road, and Lyell Avenue bore the worst, and, while no one in Gates was killed, one farmer was bitten by his crazed horse, and the Meisenzahl family of Wegman Road saw the roof of their large dairy barn fly five hundred feet into a field.

All in all, the damage passed a total of more than one million dollars. The following Sunday, Father Baier asked for prayers of thanksgiving that nothing worse had happened to the parish, although on the day of the storm the trustees had unanimously passed a resolution to look into the possibility of obtaining "cyclone" insurance on the church buildings.

Maybe the wind was a portent of hard times, for the years 1935 to 1937, during the Depression,



"Silver Birch Dairy" – the DeRuysscher Family Homestead, part of which was purchased for later parish use



This home on Long Pond Road served as temporary rectory from November, 1924, to March, 1925



The Kenney Sisters



George Meisenzahl, our first auditor, working on portable dance floor used for church festivals

proved to be the worse threat to plague the continued existence of St. Theodore's as a parish in North Gates.

Toward the end of 1929, St. Theodore's Parish borrowed twelve thousand dollars from the father of their pastor in order to retire a note due the Lincoln-Alliance Bank. This new note would be at a lower rate of interest than the bank note, and it was hoped that this action would help to make up for the dropping church receipts.

This was not to be, as further loans were to be made in time from both the Diocese of Rochester and Father Baier personally. As the times got worse economically, the estate of John B. Baier absorbed, as money due, the interest due to it and Father Baier's note was also made to reflect the same stated conditions.

By January 1, 1935, the total debt had risen to \$40,799.09 (whereas by January 1, 1930, it had been as low as \$34,400.) Some way had to be found to attack this critical problem. That step wasn't long in coming.

The pastor of St. John the Evangelist Parish on Ridge Road West in the Town of Greece passed away in 1935. On August 13, 1935, Father Baier was assigned to be pastor of that parish in addition to St. Theodore's. He moved to St. John's on August 20th, and on September 4, 1935, at a joint trustee meeting of both parishes, it was decided to move the Sisters from St. John's to the convent at St. Theodore's. They were charged a small monthly rental fee, and the Sisters of St. Theodore's were moved into the former rectory.

This did serve to help St. Theodore's financially; but the parish had to pay a real price. Father Baier continued to serve both parishes as best he could, but he could no longer be a pastor-in-residence at St. Theodore's. It is said that Sister Hilda Marie Friner, Superior and Principal from 1934 to 1940, helped to keep St. Theodore's running smoothly by inviting different priests in for Sunday services from the time Father Baier went to St. John the Evangelist's until the arrival of Father Raymond J. Epping, on June 24, 1937.

The September 4, 1935, trustees meeting also determined that each parish would remain a separate corporation, each would keep its own trustees, and all funds collected would be kept entirely separate.

The existence of St. Theodore's Parish was threatened by economic conditions; but those who had gone from house to house in the city, years earlier, seeking every penny possible for the new parish, or those who had donated hours to their parish by making thousands of biscuits for the annual chicken dinners, or those persons who had given of themselves, even more, in a variety of different ways, would not allow the original determination to be a parish be found wanting at this crucial time. No, this was not why the parishioners in both Holy Apostles and Holy Family parishes had contributed to special collections in their churches for the early support of St. Theodore's back in the 1920's.

The belt was tightened a notch more and the tasks of maintaining a parish were continued. In fact, in 1935 and 1936, an expansion took place that was a result, entirely, of the devotion of the parishioners toward their parish.

Growing Again

A hall for social activities was needed, and the addition of one classroom would also be of benefit to the parish. The opportunity to obtain both presented itself when the Rochester School Board agreed to sell an abandoned portable school building located at John Marshall High School in Rochester. The parish was able to buy it for one hundred dollars, provided they would cart the building away. This was agreed and the deal was made.

This bargain now meant months of back-breaking labor for the men. Using Bill Daggar's platform truck to pick up the divided sections of the portable school building, they transported them to St. Theodore's. A borrowed crane was used to raise the sections in place and then almost one thousand dollars was spent putting the portable school building into shape for use as a hall and for adding one more classroom to the school complex.

The men of the parish contributed the necessary labor whenever they had time free from their regular jobs. This created a schedule of working until late in the evenings and putting long hours in on the weekends. To these volunteers, the church and school were worth any price, and they would pay that price three times over if necessary.

to keep it. St. Theodore's Parish would not be allowed to die — no matter what. All that was needed now was to find a priest who would assume the gigantic task of turning the downward spiral around and putting everything back on its feet!

The priest to meet that challenge was found in the person of Reverend Raymond J. Epping, who was born on January 12, 1896, and ordained June 11, 1921. He was assigned to the pastorship of St. Theodore's on June 24, 1937, by Bishop Edward G. Mooney, (later Cardinal Mooney).

As Father Epping recalls, "The parish had been vacant for two years and Bishop Mooney was considering closing it permanently, so it was with many misgivings on his part but with high hope on my part that I took the assignment."

Father Epping wasn't totally unfamiliar with his new assignment, as Sister Hilda Marie had asked him to help with lenten services some time earlier, and he had responded, coming from Aquinas Institute where he had been a mathematics teacher.

The new pastor immediately acted to re-open the rectory and return the school Sisters of St. Theodore's to their convent, recently vacated by the Sisters from St. John the Evangelist, who had returned to their own parish.

Next, he instituted further economies to get the parish back on its feet. Setting an outstanding example of quiet courage and determination, he relinquished all salary for a year and a half, a move made possible by the generosity of his immediate family. He also began new fund-raising programs (who can forget the Blanket and Linen Clubs?) and made a concentrated effort to raise the amount of the weekly contributions given by the parishioners.

These efforts began to pay off, as the parish debt, which had reached a highpoint of \$42, 213. 95 on January 1, 1938, was brought down to a more manageable sum of \$29, 318.06 by January 1, 1947.

The future goals of growth and building were still to be realized when Father Epping assumed his role as pastor. First the parish had to struggle through the remainder of the Great Depression and face the national challenge and participation of World War II.

Who can forget Sunday, December 7, 1941, and the attack on Pearl Harbor by the Japanese? "A day that will live in infamy," said President Roosevelt. Everyone in America had a job to do, whether on the home front or overseas, to help



*Ordination Dinner of the Lynch Brothers,
St. Theodore's Hall, December 19, 1943*

defeat her foreign enemies — and St. Theodore's Parish responded to that challenge.

Many parishioners were involved in the "Daughters of Freedom," helping with the Red Cross, working with the Gates Home Bureau, and helping out with the canteen for the armed forces personnel. Remember the black-outs and Civil Defense?

The prayers of all were realized, as St. Theodore's Parish has never had any of its sons or daughters killed in battle, either during World War II, the Korean Conflict, or the Vietnam War.

Expansion and Growth

With World War II behind them, St. Theodore's parishioners could now look forward to the beginning of a second, even greater period of growth, and the first sign of that activity was the arrival of the parish's First Assistant (in later years called "Associate") Pastor on July 8, 1947, in the person of Reverend Joseph G. Gefell who was to serve until 1951.



1945. Through the years this young people's organization served its parish by putting on social and religious events, and by involving themselves in the needs of their community. Miss Norma Amesbury (later Sister Ann de Porres, S.S.J.) was the first president of the Sodality. In the 1960's the Sodality eventually was shaped into an ever-renewing Youth Club, which is still functioning.

In order to grow, more hands were needed; and the time was now ripe for the beginning of an Altar Rosary Society to replace the older Rosary Society which had become dormant when Father Baier left for St. John the Evangelist Parish in 1935. On May 12, 1948, Mrs. Eugene McCarthy became the first president of the Altar Rosary Society.

This resurgence of energy and activity hinted at a better future for what had been an economically troubled parish. It was time to rejoice and to celebrate, and no more fitting occasion than the parish's twenty-fifth anniversary became the vehicle for those feelings.

A Time to Celebrate

At 9:30 a.m. on Sunday, December 4, 1949, a Solemn High Mass was held to give thanks to God for all His help in the past and to ask His blessing on the parish's expansion needs in the future.

Father Baier, the founding pastor, was present as honored guest, and Fathers Joseph and Leo E. Lynch, ordained from St. Theodore's, assisted at the Solemn High Mass. On Tuesday, the celebrations closed with the children providing entertainment at the school hall.

It was the remodeling of the parish hall into a new use as a church, opening for Mass on June 24, 1951, that marked the first real step toward realizing the old dream of expanding church and school facilities to meet the needs of an ever-increasing suburban growth. The remodeling allowed the old church to be turned into three additional classrooms to help meet the increasing school enrollment.

A home for the parish caretaker was also purchased in 1951 at a cost of \$12,120.26. The home was located on Spencerport Road across from the church and school.

In order to expand sufficiently to satisfy the needs of the parish, Father Epping knew it would be necessary to have more land than the present

Other assistant pastors have been Reverend Lawrence W. Sansom, 1951-1953; Reverend Vincent P. Collins, 1953-1954; Reverend John J. Steger, 1954-1968; Reverend James A. Schwartz, 1968-1972; and presently filling that position, Reverend Frank J. Falletta, who came to us in 1972.

Father Gefell was now able to assume some of the burdens that had been Father Epping's sole responsibility. One of the areas in which he excelled was working with the young people of the parish.

A Boy Scout Troop (No. 94) had been chartered on January 31, 1946, with Mr. Harold Ehmann listed as its Scoutmaster. Father Gefell began working with the boys of this group as he was later to do with the girls of the various sections of the Girl Scout movement, when they were instituted at St. Theodore's. In later years Cub Scout Pack (No. 94) would be added to the parish scene.

One youth group, composed of boys and girls of high-school age, whom Father Gefell was to work with, was the Sodality. This group had been started by a number of young women from St. Theodore's who were sodalists in their Catholic high school, and who, with the help of Father Roy Morphy (Diocesan Sodality Office) began the organization in the Fall of

four acres purchased in 1925. Four acres were too small; and unless something nearby could be found, it was inevitable that the new church and school would have to be located somewhere else at a price beyond the financial capabilities of the parish.

What was to be done?

Directly adjacent, to the west, was a forty-eight acre parcel of land that had once been part of the DeRuyscher Family's "Silver Birch" Dairy Farm. The owners of this particular parcel had not kept up the payment of taxes.

Starting in 1947, a movement was begun by the parish to have the County of Monroe foreclose on the property because of back taxes owed.

On Tuesday, June 3, 1952, the Town government of Gates, headed by Supervisor Elbert Finch, held a special referendum on a proposal to purchase the forty-eight acres for a park and recreation purposes. A portion of the property, then purchased, would be allocated to St. Theodore's Parish, Harding School District, and the Wesleyan Methodist Church, all in need of expansion. The referendum passed and Supervisor Finch had the right to spend as much as forty-eight hundred dollars for the property as soon as the County foreclosed for back taxes.

Father Epping, now seeing the land purchase a distinct possibility, decided it was time to mount the first major appeal for financial aid in the parish. On Sunday, November 1, 1953, the parish was covered by volunteers seeking a total of one hundred thousand dollars in two-year pledges. Thus a building fund was begun to be used in the building of a new church and school. Some eighty thousand dollars was pledged in this campaign.

The efforts on the part of everyone interested in getting the County of Monroe to foreclose on the property and then sell the land for back taxes finally bore fruit in 1955. The land was to be sold on the courthouse steps on November 23, 1955.

The plan was for the County to buy it and then sell it to the Town of Gates who would implement a division of the land as suggested in the 1952 successful referendum. Along came a contractor who bid beyond the authorizations of both the county agent and the town agent, and so Father Epping had to go it alone. The bidding went to nineteen thousand two hundred and fifty dollars before St. Theodore's Parish became the owners of thirty-eight additional acres out of the original forty-eight-acre parcel.

Father Epping concluded, "It would cost so much to move our plant to some other location that I was forced to bid. We probably now possess the largest area of any parish in the diocese. It took us long enough to get it."

The money derived from the 1953 Building Fund allowed the parish to begin building the new church and school as soon as arrangements could be made. On July 8, 1956, a nineteen-year dream for Father Epping was realized as he turned the spade of earth for the groundbreaking of the new church and school. Sorely missed at this historic event, prophesied by Bishop Thomas Hickey in 1925, was the founding pastor, Father John Baier, who had passed away on March 23, 1956. Following the ground-breaking, a parish picnic was held by the parishioners on the school grounds.

This same year a parking area (still in use) was built, and later paved, to the east of the present church and school. Total cost for both construction and paving was \$32,396.46.

Building Again

The 1953 Building Fund was inadequate to construct the proposed new seven hundred-seat church, and the new school, which would be an eight-classroom, ground level building adjoining the rear of the church in "T" formation. Both of these buildings were to be erected with an eye to further expansion in the future. In fact, it was anticipated that the new church could serve one day as a hall for the school and parish. Everyone felt that a more magnificent church edifice would one day rise to touch the sky in the town of Gates; but the dictates of Vatican II, yet to come, were to show that the church created in 1957 would fit completely the conception of more functional and practical church buildings, with additional monies and energies to be spent on the spiritual and human needs of the people of the parish, the community, and the world.

In November of 1956, another campaign was held, this time with a goal of one hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars in three-year pledges. On Sunday, November 11th, the volunteers again set out, going from house to house for contributions in order to reach the established goal.

By Sunday, June 30, 1957, when the ceremonies were conducted for the laying of the

cornerstone for the new church and school, Father Epping knew that the necessary money would be forthcoming as a result of pledges made in 1956. The cornerstone laying, at which time the trowel first used by Bishop Hickey was again used by Father Epping, was followed by a successful parish picnic.

For the blessing and the dedication of the new church, a dinner was planned for inside the parish's new Social Center, created by a three-day remodeling job on the part of the parishioners.

It was with bursting hearts of happiness and joy that the new church was filled by the parishioners on Saturday, November 9th, the feast of St. Theodore, when Bishop James E. Kearney said Mass and then dedicated and blessed both the church and the school.

For some of the older parishioners a real watershed had been reached, for they now knew that moving into the larger buildings marked the end of St. Theodore's as a rural parish. No longer would it be possible to attend church and personally know everyone present. No longer would there be leisurely walks to church and the casual passing of conversation following the close of Mass.

Who could forget attending Mass in the remodeled Social Center during the 1950's, when overcrowding would find some of the parishioners placed in a room behind the altar, and they would serve at Mass while facing the priest. Could St. Theodore's have been the first in the diocese?

The growth in population on the part of St. Theodore's was also present in the Town of Gates, especially as regarded the growing numbers of children of school age. This was why individual school districts finally voted for consolidation and centralization with school districts in the Town of Chili, and formed the Gates-Chili Central School District. As part of this consolidation, plans were made for building the first high school in the new district. How would these teen-agers be ministered to regarding the release-time program and their need for religious instruction?

All the area Catholic churches sending children to the proposed high school had the same problems, particularly concerning transportation to a site other than the high school for these instructions. Released for only one hour, transportation became a paramount problem.

Mr. Edward Meisenzahl, a member of



The Gates-Chili School of Religion opened its doors September 1, 1958

St. Theodore's Church, donated to the church a section of his property which abutted the high-school property, for use as a site for a three-room "catechetical center." Here seminarians could teach the high school children, and they would have only a short walk to attend these classes.

The land was accepted and a center was erected and opened on September 1, 1958. The center was called the "Gates-Chili School of Religion" and was built at a cost of twenty-eight thousand dollars. Four parishes, St. Helen's, Holy Ghost, St. Pius X, and St. Theodore's, who retained title, ran the center on a cooperative basis. This ended in 1972, when each individual parish resumed instructing their teen-agers in their own parishes because of the need to use lay people because seminarians were in short supply. The building presently serves the community as a Teen Center for those young people who need a place to go and meet their friends and enjoy their common friendships.

Father Epping had seen so much growth on the part of St. Theodore's Parish, a parish which had kept its doors remaining open back in 1937, when the hard times had called for their closing. He had done much in the way of taking St. Theodore's to its level of full maturity.

On June 28, 1960, Reverend Elmer W. Heindl became the new pastor, and now Father Epping could close the books on his twenty-three years as pastor of St. Theodore's. His tenure was the longest in St. Theodore's first fifty years. As "Pastor Emeritus" he also became the first to celebrate fifty years in the priesthood. It is still a joy, in 1974, to see Father Epping celebrating Sunday Mass and gently reminding us not to forget to take a church bulletin home in order to remember all the announcements.



*Reverend Elmer W. Heindl
Pastor, 1960-1961*



*First Convent — The building was in
use for thirty-five years, 1928-1963*

*Reverend Raymond J. Epping
Pastor, 1937-1960*



The joy of the 1961 New Year was shattered when sixty-six-year-old Sister Rose Patricia, a sixth grade teacher at St. Theodore's, was struck and killed by a public transit bus the morning of January 17th.

Loved by everyone, her death spurred an interest in seeing that a new convent be constructed on the north side of Spencerport Road near the church and school so that never again would any of the Sisters be endangered by having to cross traffic-filled Spencerport Road.

The creation of a new convent awaited the coming of the new pastor, Right Reverend Monsignor Dennis W. Hickey, who was appointed on June 27, 1961, to replace the reassigned Reverend Elmer W. Heindl.

A convent building fund was started, and in 1962 construction was begun on the new convent which was located to the west of the present church and school. Candy sales and other forms of fund-raising were used to obtain the necessary monies without a general parish campaign. By the Spring of 1963 the Sisters were able to move into their new accommodations, and the first Mass in the new convent was said on April 29, 1963. In June of 1963 the old convent was sold.

It was at this time that Pope John XXIII, of blessed memory, passed away leaving a legacy of "Aggiornamento" and a belief in the common solidarity of all followers of Christ that is a spirit of ecumenism. The meetings of Vatican II, a Council of the Catholic Bishops of the world, began to bring about a new approach making the Church of God more meaningful to the people of God, and toward increasing the role of the lay person in that new relationship.

Bishop Dennis Hickey reflected over those days, "It wasn't so much when we first had the priest facing the people (July, 1966) as when we finally removed the altar rail. This changed, radically, the appearance of the church, and many found it hard to adjust. The people of St. Theodore's were always so good about giving everything new and different an honest chance for acceptance."

One new organization that came upon the parish scene at this time was the Legion of Mary. Miss Doris Oplinger became its first president in June of 1964, and until her untimely death she helped to shape this apostolic laymen's group into one of the most imaginative and active organizations possible.

Population Problems

Meanwhile, the old problem of rapid suburban growth had reached the crisis stage regarding both the church and the school.

The school had been adding extra classes in the old school buildings almost yearly until the old buildings were again fully functioning. It became time to consider adding additional classrooms on to the new school.

In 1965, the trustees of St. Theodore's Church voted to borrow two hundred and fifty thousand dollars from Lincoln Rochester Trust to help cover the remainder of the total amount needed, which was three hundred and fifty thousand dollars.

April of 1966 was set as the target date for completion, and the new school wing opened in September of 1966.

It is interesting to note that the parish's new convent, the addition to the school, and a new rectory built in 1972, at a cost of sixty-four thousand dollars, were erected without general campaign drives in the parish. The determination of the parishioners to accept these debts and then pay them off by having Fall festivals, candy sales, and later on Bingo, to supplement the regular weekly contributions, is worthy of a book all by itself. This attitude of personal sacrifice allowed the parish to be started in 1924, to survive the Great Depression, and to flourish at the time of its Fiftieth Anniversary.

A corollary problem to the burgeoning suburban growth was the tremendous number of schoolchildren from the public grammar schools who were involved in the released-time program for religious instruction. Thus, in the Fall of 1966, a CCD Parish Organization was formed, and Mrs. Margaret DeJonge became the first part-time volunteer coordinator, serving from 1966-1971.

"It became impossible to handle them all in one hour's time, even those who had to come out from the Spencerport School District on our church's school bus, which Bert Jacobsmeier would volunteer to drive. Father Steger would handle all the schoolchildren from Thomas Edison School in the Old Gates Town Hall on Buffalo Road. This was a mammoth operation.

"So then it became a question of quality instead of quantity and we went to a Saturday morning program, in which we could do more for the children without the restrictions of knowing

that they would have to be back to school in an hour, as it was under the old system."

This was Bishop Hickey reflecting on the released-time programs as he also told about the other half of the suburban growth problem, that of crowded church services.

"St. Theodore's was never looked upon as a large place. Growing so big so fast was all a surprise to diocesan officials. But then one time Bishop Casey (Auxiliary Bishop) came out for Confirmation, and he found it difficult to get in the church, it was so crowded. This made a believer out of him.

"At one time we had up to thirty-five hundred parishioners on a Sunday, and this forced us to create a 10:45 a.m. Mass for the school hall. Even that Mass drew a couple of hundred."

This problem was finally alleviated when in June of 1968 the new parish of St. Jude's was created to the west of St. Theodore's with St. Theodore's Assistant Pastor, Reverend John Steger, as its first pastor.

June of 1968 saw a big change in St. Theodore's Church as both the pastor and the assistant pastor left for new assignments.

In the case of Right Reverend Monsignor Hickey, it was a most singular honor for the parish. First, when he was elected by his fellow priests to the post of Vicar-General of the diocese, and then when it was announced by Bishop Fulton J. Sheen, Bishop of the Rochester Diocese, that the new Vicar-General was to be appointed Auxiliary Bishop.

It was with great pride and joy that members of St. Theodore's Parish traveled to Sacred Heart Cathedral to see their pastor consecrated on March 14, 1968. St. Theodore's really did not lose the presence of Bishop Hickey when he left to do his new work, as he was eventually given offices in the new Diocesan Pastoral Center on Buffalo Road in the Town of Gates, which, coincidentally, is geographically within St. Theodore's boundaries. (This site had also been used for the former St. Andrew's Junior Seminary and the former co-educational high school, King's Preparatory).

It is interesting to note that the second Bishop Hickey was in no way related to Bishop Thomas Hickey, who had first authorized the creation of St. Theodore's Parish in 1924.



The burning of first permanent church and school buildings as a planned training exercise — February 25, 1973

Serving Fully the "People of God"

Coming to St. Theodore's as the new pastor and assistant pastor as of June 27, 1968, were Reverend Gerald E. Dunn and Reverend James A. Schwartz.

Reverend Gerald E. Dunn, born on May 6, 1923, and ordained June 4, 1948, had grown up on Indiana Street in the City of Rochester's east side. All his priestly pastoral assignments following ordination were to keep him on the west side of the City of Rochester, including St. Theodore's.

His previous assignments as assistant pastor had been at Immaculate Conception, 1948-1955; St. Patrick's, Corning, New York, 1955-1958; and then St. Monica's, 1958-1968. In conjunction with his pastoral duties he pioneered diocesan work in the Family Life Bureau by helping to bring it home to the parishes.

Now he was to work directly with the hundreds of families of St. Theodore's Parish, involving and serving fully its complete range of human life from the youngest child to the senior citizen, and seeing that the laity take a greater and greater role in the life of the parish.

"Lay people can be involved even more deeply in the apostolic work of this parish in the years ahead. Their participation will set the keynote for our next fifty years. I even see them taking Communion to the shut-in and the sick, a real apostolate."

Father Dunn wasn't long in encouraging the setting up of additional programs to help the very young members of the People of God.

In the Fall of 1968 the parish's first Sunday morning pre-school program for four- and five-year olds was established by Mrs. Jane Eisenhauer its first director. In the Fall of 1972 this pre-school program was expanded to include three-year-olds during the directorship of Mrs. Carol Gabel.

A real need for a kindergarten class in the school was also visualized, and that was well underway by the beginning of the 1971-1972 school year in the basement of the convent. Mrs. Mary Ann Wingfield was the first kindergarten teacher.

Other changes were also taking place in the liturgy of the Mass now that Latin was no longer being used and English had replaced it. Lay people were used as lectors at Mass, and eventually the Sisters distributed Communion. Even Masses to fulfill the Sunday obligation were added on Saturday, and a liturgical service, which became known as the "Folk Mass" and had a special appeal to the young, was begun in 1969.

One person who realized that the "Folk Mass" could be made an even greater experience was Mrs. Emily Gundrum. She received permission to establish a folk group for singing and musical accompaniment at the "Folk Mass;" and within a few months, in September of 1969, the folk group made its initial appearance under the direction of Mr. Robert Schwartz and Mr. William Turner, its



Monsignor Dennis W. Hickey, Moderator, at meeting of St. Theodore's Legion of Mary, March, 1968

Graduating Class of 1970. Reverend Gerald E. Dunn, Pastor of St. Theodore's, Reverend John J. Steger, Pastor of St. Jude's, and Reverend James A. Schwartz, former Associate Pastor, with happy graduates



first co-leaders. They are certainly a pleasant addition at the 10:00 Mass.

Another pleasant addition is the reactivation of the parish's adult choir under the leadership of Mr. Paul Agosto, which made its first appearance in 1974, the fiftieth anniversary year.

September of 1969 also saw the approval of St. Theodore's Parish to participate in the diocese's deacon assistantship program, which had begun unofficially in 1968. Those deacons who served at St. Theodore's prior to their ordination have been Reverend Richard Masciangelo, CPPS, 1968-69; Reverend Michael Donnelly, 1969-1970; Reverend Dennis Shaw, 1970-1971; Reverend Robert Weiss, 1971-1972; Reverend Jeremiah Moynihan, 1972-1973; and Reverend James Reposkey, 1973-1974. Their help has been invaluable to the life of the parish.

September of 1969 was an especially active month in that the present bingo program was started, replacing the "Festivals" of past years. This program of supplemental income was first held on Thursday nights and then moved to Sunday nights commencing December 28, 1969. Those who have contributed to this vital fund-raising program have made real sacrifices of their time and talents and have helped to make this program a success.

Father Dunn also saw the need for the creation of an executive committee comprised of the heads of different parish lay groups and the parish's trustees. This committee would help to plan and coordinate the life of the parish better and would also help to avoid unnecessary overlapping of programs and energies by the various organizations. These lay people could also bring their combined talents to help find solutions for the future needs of their parish. The executive committee was born on April 29, 1969, and it eventually became a precursor for the formation of the first Parish Council, in 1971.

When St. Theodore's first Parish Council was organized officially on October 28, 1971, it was among the first to be implemented in the Diocese of Rochester. Its original officers were Mr. Charles R. Dispenza, Chairman; Mr. Sam Palma, Vice-Chairman; and Mrs. Grace Schiano, Secretary.

The Parish Ad Hoc Committee which had drawn up the plans for implementing this new organization felt that the Parish Council should be comprised of the following committees which were accepted: Worship; Finance; Social Action (later

called Human Development); Education; Building and Maintenance; and a Youth Representative (later drawn from the Youth Club).

In the short time that the Parish Council has existed, the people involved, consisting of both elected representatives and ex-officio members drawn from the parish's institutions, have done an excellent job in contributing toward the implementation of new and vital ways of answering God's question, "We do love you." It is even felt that a Family Life Committee may be the next new way of bettering the parish's service to the People of God.

In 1972, when the Diocese of Rochester created the Southwest Region as one of its new regions, it wasn't too long before St. Theodore's joined this additional program for better service to its parishioners through cooperative effort.

One milestone that was reached for the first time in St. Theodore's history occurred on December 3, 1970, when authorization was given to pay off the remaining bank debt, and the parish became "debt free" under Father Dunn.

In February of 1973 the burning of the old church and school as a fire drill exercise by the Gates-Chili Fire Department made everyone on the way to Sunday Mass think back to the early days of their parish, and how far they had come in almost fifty years. It was ironic that almost a decade earlier the old Kenney farmhome, St. Theodore's first home, had also been burned in a fire drill exercise by the Gates-Chili Fire Department to make room for the planned J. M. Fields Shopping Plaza.

The meetings were busy in 1973 for the Parish Council, as they had to make arrangements for the celebration of the up-coming fiftieth anniversary and to plan the parish's participation in the Silver Jubilee of their pastor, scheduled for Sunday, June 10, 1973. One might note that all five pastors in St. Theodore's first fifty years were assigned there just prior to the twenty-fifth anniversary of each one's ordination to the Priesthood.

An important step was taken by the Parish Council in 1973, when they voted to have a full-time religious education coordinator in order to do as effective a job as possible in this area. Sister Mary Towns was appointed to fill this role on July 1, 1973.



Groundbreaking for Dunn Tower Apartments. L. to r: Bishop Dennis W. Hickey, the Honorable Barber Conable, Reverend Gerald E. Dunn, Mr. Albert Hinkle

A Loving Need

The year closed with one of the most momentous occasions ever to take place in the history of the parish. On December 1, 1973, at 12:00 noon, the groundbreaking for Dunn Tower Apartments was held with many state and local officials present. Senior citizens of the Town of Gates would now have an apartment project thirteen stories high (the tallest building in the Town of Gates and most of Monroe County) with one hundred and ninety-two units in which to live and enjoy the years yet ahead of them.

This senior citizens' project, to be built on 6.2 acres of land donated by St. Theodore's Parish from the land originally purchased through Father Epping's foresight in 1955, was the result of one man's determination to see a loving need filled for a growing segment of the town's population.

That man was Reverend Gerald E. Dunn, Pastor of St. Theodore's Parish, and the time was 1969.

"I was at a meeting of the different church leaders at Parkminster United Presbyterian Church in August of 1969, where Mr. Charles Russell came to talk to us about trying to help the senior citizens of Gates with needed housing. He told us that approximately four hundred senior citizens had asked for property tax relief since they made six thousand dollars or less income a year. He told

us that about three thousand senior citizens lived in the Town of Gates and would some day be in need of a place that would demand almost maintenance-free care; and if they didn't have it, they would have to sell their homes and leave the town they had lived in for so many years. Mr. Russell wanted to see co-ops built for them, but I was open in my mind to exploring all the possibilities.

"The meeting broke up with none other scheduled, and so I decided later to see what I and our parish could do to help these people. This would be a 'loving' need for our senior citizens and at least we had the land and a prime location to go with it. Bus line, shopping areas, and churches are all conveniently near St. Theodore's."

Thus Father Dunn told how the struggle was begun to convince the diocesan authorities, then the federal government, and finally the State of New York and Town of Gates officials to cooperate in filling this need. Every step took careful preparation and planning to get all the necessary approvals.

The cooperation and support of Supervisor Joseph Campbell and the Town Board, the Planning Board, and the Zoning Board all meeting on one night made things more expeditious for the adherents of this project. A "first" in the history of the Town of Gates.

The Gates Housing and Allied Facilities Corporation, a non-profit corporation, was formed to construct Dunn Tower Apartments. The members



Boy Scouts

*The rich rewards of parish life
encompass every age, fulfill every need*



Choir

Folk Group



Cub Scouts



Brownies

of its first board of directors are: Reverend Gerald E. Dunn, President; Mr. Herbert Zimmer, Vice-President; Mrs. Mary Schutt, Secretary; J. Walter Knapp, M.D.; Sister Marie Michelle; and Reverend Edward E. Steinkirchner.

"The enthusiasm and support that I got from the parish was most encouraging even when so many other people told us it couldn't be done. This building is needed, and so you keep on going no matter what the obstacle."

Eventually all obstacles and delays were hurdled and the New York State Division of Housing and Community Renewal agreed to finance both the one hundred and three thousand dollars for planning and the four-million-dollar mortgage with which to build the Tower. The federal government would help with subsidy payments so as to keep the rent amount within the reach of those on fixed incomes.

As Mr. Albert Hinkle, Assistant Commissioner of the New York State Division of Housing and Community Renewal, said at the groundbreaking, "This is the first state aided housing to be built for the elderly in the Town of Gates; first, also, proposed senior citizen housing project in the area surrounding Rochester.

"On the first floor will be a community center for all the senior citizens of Gates to use for their meetings and their social affairs. This will be their place in the community to come together and enjoy life. Why we even hope to have garden plots for them."

At the beginning of this book the question was asked if the people of St. Theodore's Parish can say, either individually or together, whether they love God.

The sacrifices of the last fifty years, the generous surrendering to the total community of their land, their contributions to society in general as doctors, lawyers, public officials, teachers, businessmen, ad infinitum, all add up to the answer expressed for the last fifty years as well for tomorrow, "Yes, God, You know that we love You."

May our Anniversary Mass on June 30th and our Outdoor Mass on September 2, 1974, have sent this message to God as we ask His blessing on us, the people of God, in this our Fiftieth Anniversary Year



Acknowledgments

*"Let each of you look not only to his own interest
but also to the interest of others." Philippians 2:4*

*I believe that the aforementioned Biblical Quotation
expresses the spirit and hard work of the many
people who made this yearbook possible. For their
special interest as "People of God" here at
St. Theodore's, public commendation is given to:*

*Sam Palma and Herb Zimmer as Co-Chairmen
of the Jubilee Year Committee*

*Domenick White, author and editor, for
giving life and direction to this project*

*John Tanza and Louis LoMaglio, Co-Chairmen,
and the other members of the General Parish
Solicitation Sub-Committee for the many
hours calling on our family community*

*John Maggio and Bob Delmonte, Co-Chairmen
of the Business Solicitation Sub-Committee,
whose members carried the major financial
burden*

*Gladys Zimmer, Treasurer, who put it all
together and by her smile indicated
"mission accomplished"*

*Finally, and most important, a "Thank You" to all
those Sponsors on the following pages who answered
the call of these workers in a friendly and positive way.*

*Costanzo Caruso
Yearbook Chairman*



*When a book is written to serve as a
vehicle for the presentation and preservation of
historical "truths," the historian must draw
upon facts, or truths, compiled from many
sources. Although he shares the responsibility
for the collection of these facts with others, he
alone is solely responsible for the way in which
they are used.*

*Enough thanks can never be given to all
those who have helped me collect or organize
the information contained in this book, but I
should like to acknowledge my unending debt
to the individuals whose names follow for their
invaluable, "extra-necessary," assistance:*

*Bishop Dennis W. Hickey; Reverend Robert F.
McNamara; Miss Anna Ries; Mrs. Gladys Zimmer;
Miss Elizabeth Klett; Mr. Sidney Bowman;
Mr. Stephen Hryniak; Mr. Charles R. Dispenza;
the Librarians of the Local History Division of
the Rochester Public Library; and most
affectionately my wife, Beatrice.*

*I dedicate this book to Reverend Gerald
E. Dunn, Pastor of St. Theodore's Parish.*

*All errors in fact or content are my sole
responsibility, and any corrections thought
necessary should be brought to my attention.*

Domenick White

Directory of Parish Organizations – Golden Jubilee Year

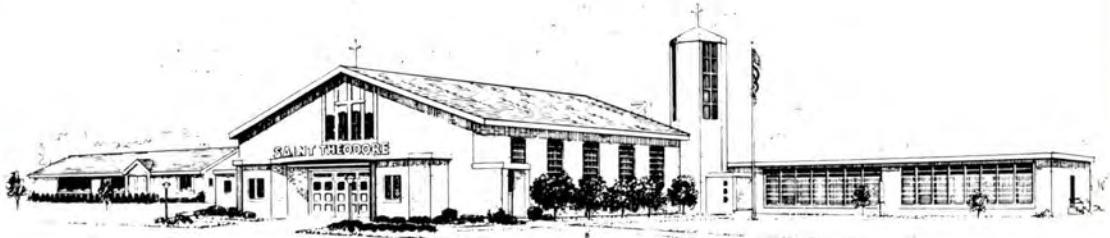
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In Memory of Ray D'Allesandro
from children Ray, Randy and Domenick Cimino

In Memory of Damiano and Carmella DiPerno

In Memory of Frank Hess

In Memory of Gennaro and Margaret Marcello

In Memory of Margaret Meyer

In Memory of Frank, Theresa, and Peter Reber

In Memory of Anthony Schiano

In Memory of Frank Surace (Father)

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In Memory of Charles V. J. Hauck
In Memory of Elizabeth Marion
In Memory of Daniel McDunning
In Memory of Frank and Anna Oister
In Memory of Charles Raymond
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In Memory of Mr. and Mrs. Bartolo Spallina
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